

BOOK REVIEW

Herpetology of China. Er-Mi Zhao and Kraig Adler. 1993. Society for the Study of Amphibians and Reptiles/Chinese Society for the Study of Amphibians and Reptiles. SSAR Contributions to Herpetology Number 10, St. Louis, Missouri. Available from: Robert D. Aldridge, Publications Secretary, Department of Biology, St. Louis University, 3507 Laclede, St. Louis, Missouri 63103, U.S.A. Price: US\$60.

China is a country of superlatives: this is one of the largest political units on earth, with a total land area of approximately 9.6 million sq km, has the highest human population (over a billion people) and a virtually unmatched habitat, as well as altitudinal and vegetational ranges. Predictably, the herpetofauna is one of the world's richest, with 661 species of amphibians and reptiles reported. This fauna has been the subject of studies that commenced from the time of Confucius (Fu-Tzu K'ung [Fu-Zi Kung] in Chinese), who lived between 551-479 B.C. Important contributors to the present day knowledge of the herpetofauna includes the early Chinese scholars, European explorers and most recently, the current generation of Chinese biologists who virtually dominate herpetological research in Asia. These studies have been summarized in a single, elegant volume by two of the world's most respected herpetologists, Prof. Er-Mi Zhao of the Chengdu Institute of Biology, China and Prof. Kraig Adler of Cornell University, U.S.A.

The book is impressive from the physical standpoint, the 522 pages being acid- and groundwood-free (and therefore will survive many years of use even in the field), bound in Roxite C-1 cloth (vellum finish). The production specifications at the end of the book indicate that 2,000 copies have been printed, and given the large number of herpetologists in China and students of east Asian herpetology, will soon be out of print.

The contents page follows a superb water colour by Chinese artist Yi-sheng Wang of a female *Draco maculatus*. The introduction includes sections of the purpose and organization of the book ("... to develop a historical context for current research and also to provide an introduction to contemporary Chinese researchers and their activities..."), acknowledgements and dedication and is followed by a history of herpetological studies in China. Pioneering herpetologists who collected and/or observed the herpetofauna are illustrated, where not possible by black-and-white photographs, by paintings from archives (sources mentioned on p. 522) and in the case of Confucius, by a line drawing. Details of faunal investigations conducted in the recent years (beginning in 1949) are listed by province, which are followed by a listing of herpetological research by discipline (including biochemistry, embryology, osteology and anatomy, ultrastructural studies, karyology, autecology, other ecological studies, parasitology and palaeontology). Miscellaneous issues discussed here include the herpetological studies in Hong Kong and Macao, the cooperative research programmes with foreign scientists, endangered and economically important species, Chinese herpetological journals and an account of the Chinese herpetological societies and meetings.

The second section is perhaps the most important in the book for modern scholars of